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Level » Advanced

Style » Individual or group activities



Welcome to the Guardian Weekly's special news-based materials to support learners and teachers of English. Each month, the Guardian Weekly newspaper selects topical news articles that can be used to practise English language skills. The materials are graded for two levels: Advanced and Lower Intermediate. These worksheets can be downloaded free from guardian.co.uk/weekly/. You can also find more advice for teachers and learners from the Guardian Weekly's Learning English section on the site.

Materials prepared by Janet Hardy-Gould

Germany's teachers campaign for simpler handwriting



Joined-up letters ... schoolchildren must learn an official script Alamy

Before reading

- 1 The article is about handwriting. Look at the pairs of adjectives below. Where is your handwriting in relation to these adjectives? Mark an "x" on each line.

illegible	_____	legible
plain	_____	decorative
sprawling	_____	neat

Compare and explain your answers to a partner.

- 2 Look at the headline, photo and caption. Answer the questions.

a What changes to handwriting are some German teachers proposing?

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b Why do you think they are asking for these changes?

c Do you have an official or standard script in your country?

3 Verbs from the article. Complete the definitions with the verbs below.

abolish, master, mourn, print, unify

a If you something, you feel sadness because it no longer exists.

b If you a system or a law, you officially end it.

c If you your handwriting, you write without joining the letters together.

d If you something, you learn or understand it completely.

e If you two things, you join them together to make a single unit.

Article

Germany's teachers campaign for simpler handwriting

- 1 It has long been a painful rite of passage for German schoolchildren - learning "die Schreibschrift", a fiddly form of joined-up handwriting all pupils are expected to have mastered by the time they leave primary school.
- 2 But many German teachers have had enough, insisting it is a waste of time to force children to learn a cursive script when they have already learned to print letters at kindergarten. Furthermore, they say, the joined-up handwriting is often illegible.
- 3 The national primary schoolteachers' union has started a campaign to abolish compulsory teaching of Schreibschrift. "It's completely unnecessary, a deadweight tradition," according

to the union's deputy chairman, Ulrich Hecker.

- 4 He wants other states to follow Hamburg's lead, which recently took the rather radical step of introducing a new, easier alphabet called "die Grundschrift" that can take children all the way from tracing their first letters to full fluency in adulthood.
- 5 It is an idea some German scholars consider culturally traitorous. "Joined-up handwriting trains fine motor skills, develops [a sense for] aesthetics. An apparently easier script also simplifies thoughts. I would mourn the loss of a piece of our writing culture," Dr Hans Kaufmann, regional head of the Society for German Language in Hamburg, told Bild newspaper.
- 6 When they start school, most German children begin by getting to grips with holding a pencil and then printing individual letters. At the end of the first year they are then introduced to the cursive script.
- 7 "It means they have to learn two scripts one after another, which wastes time and interrupts the learning process," said Hecker. "With Grundschrift, they start with one script and stick with it."
- 8 Whereas some countries do not have a national script, Germany has developed its own style of handwriting. Before the second world war, Germans wrote in the highly decorative Sütterlin script.
- 9 In 1953, West German children began to be taught "lateinische Ausgangsschrift", a more legible joined-up script. Over in East Germany, the "Schulausgangsschrift" (model school script) was introduced. When the two Germanies became one, the handwriting was also unified, and since 1993 the "Vereinfachte Ausgangsschrift" (easier model script) has been on the syllabus.

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Glossary

rite of passage (expression) an event that marks an important stage in a person's life

fiddly (adjective) when an activity is difficult to do with your hands, especially because it involves small objects or making small movements

cursive script (noun) handwriting that has the letters joined together

traitorous (adjective) acting like a traitor; betraying friends, country or culture

While reading

1 Read the article and complete the sentences with a word or phrase from the text.

a "Die Schreibrift" is a type of handwriting that all pupils learn at .

b Teachers complain that students' handwriting in this script is frequently .

c A German teachers' wants to end the compulsory teaching of the script.

d In Hamburg a different has been brought in to help young students.

e Some critics are concerned about losing a part of German .

f In the early stages of their schooling, pupils study different ways of writing.

g Germans used a very elaborate script until the time of the .

h When East and West Germany joined together, their two scripts were .

2 Read paragraphs one to seven again. Summarise the arguments for and against the teaching of "Die Schreibrift"

Arguments for:

Arguments against:

After reading

1 -ing form or infinitive

Look at this example from the text.

... most children begin by **getting** to grips with holding a pencil. (paragraph 6)

Complete the sentences below with a verb in the -ing form or infinitive and true information about handwriting in your country.

a At primary school, pupils begin by ...

b Children are (aren't) forced ...

c Teachers (don't) expect students ...

d Many schools insist on ...

e Some students tend ...

f A lot of teachers feel it's (not) worth ...

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g Most pupils (don't) manage ...

2 Abstract nouns

Find the nouns below in the article. Which other words are they used with? Use the nouns to complete the sentences below.

lead, loss, process, step, waste, way

a Developing fine motor skills is an important part of the educational .

b Some critics believe that practising cursive script is a of effort.

c Learning to hold a pencil is an important first in the development of handwriting.

d The state of Hamburg has taken the in the area of educational change.

e Studying the new script can take students a long towards mastering neat handwriting.

f Scholars are concerned about the sudden of an important tradition.

Choose four of the words and write your own sentences. Use the words in a similar way

Activity - discussion

Read the following statements about handwriting. Decide if you agree [A] or disagree [D].

a ☐ Soon, many schools will teach keyboard skills to pupils before handwriting.

b ☐ Handwriting will exist for many years to come because it is quick, convenient and doesn't need a power source.

c ☐ In the future, people will no longer sign things. Everybody will have some form of unique digital stamp instead.

d ☐ It is important to keep the system of handwriting because it is an expression of personality and character.

Work with a partner. Write your own statement about the future of handwriting. Do people agree or disagree with it?

Answers

Before reading

2a To make handwriting simpler and to move away from the official script.

b Students' own answers.

c Students' own answers.

3a mourn **b** abolish **c** print **d** master **e** unify

While reading

1a primary school **b** illegible **c** union **d** alphabet **e** culture **f** two **g** second world war **h** unified

2 Arguments against: The script is a fiddly form of handwriting which is now an out-of-date and useless tradition. It interrupts the learning process and wastes

children's time because they need to start studying this script soon after they learn to print individual letters.

Arguments for: Learning the script helps children to develop fine motor skills and an appreciation of beautiful things. An easier script can result in the simplification of thoughts. It's also an important part of German writing culture.

After reading

1a holding **a** large pencil. **b** to use a pen. **c** to write neatly. **d** teaching an old-fashioned script. **e** to make a lot of mistakes at first. **f** spending a lot of time on handwriting. **g** to learn to write clearly by the end of primary school.

2a process **b** waste **c** step **d** lead **e** way **f** loss